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NEW ARRIVALS are HERE

f/indexfurniturenepal

Nation building

Even after the UML-Maoist alliance won a near two-third majority in Parliament-Province elections three months ago, not many were sure this would translate into the much-promised political stability.

Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal was prodding his UML counterpart KP Oli to take turns at prime ministership, letting down voters who catapulted them to power in the hope that it would end political wrangling once and for all and usher in an era of prosperity. Dahal kept bargaining even after Oli was sworn in as new prime minister on 15 February.

But Dahal made a sudden U-turn this week and agreed to allow Oli to complete his full five-year term. The seven-point unification deal signed by Nepal's two largest communist parties makes no mention of any rotational prime ministership.

The deal is also silent about Oli and Dahal co-chairing the unified party, but its seventh point states that the general convention will be held 'harmoniously as a unity convention'. Analysts interpret this to be a tacit understanding that Oli will help Dahal assume leadership of the unified party.

Political analyst Shyam Shrestha says Dahal has decided to put aside his immediate ambition to unify the communist party, but this will ultimately yield him political dividends: "That Dahal will be the

ultimate leader of the unified party is a foregone conclusion."

To summarise: Dahal has let Oli stay in Baluwatar for a full term in exchange for a commitment to eventually hand over party leadership to him. Technically, this also means Dahal can hope to be prime minister after the next parliamentary polls, but he probably knows it could easily happen before that because of Oli's poor health.

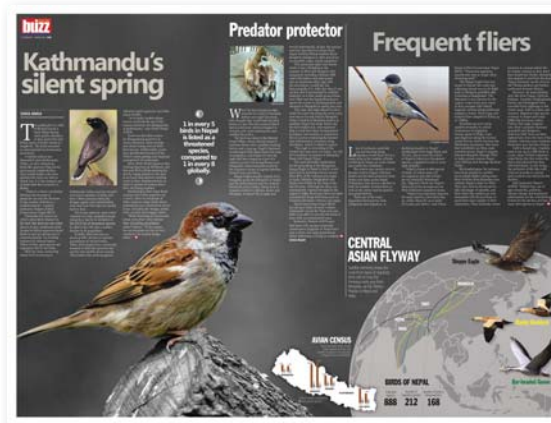
The UML-Maoist unification may finally ensure stability, but it has also raised a question about what kind of a party will be governing Nepal. Oli and Dahal both launched their political careers using violence, and both have now proven themselves to be shrewd at parliamentary wheeling-

dealing as well.

Dahal has distanced himself from Maoism, and Oli has not gone back to left extremism. The question now is: will the unified party be more like the UML or the Maoists? Dahal has climbed half-way up to take the UML saddle, while Oli is still riding.

During his short first tenure in 2015-16, Oli inspired many Nepalis to dream of a Nepal that does not solely depend on India and maintains equidistance with China. He has returned to power as one of Nepal's strongest prime ministers. He does not need to pay the nationalism card anymore — just work to leave a firm legacy of nation-building.

Om Astha Rai



Frequent fliers to Nepal

Bird populations are declining due to pesticide use and habitat loss.

PAGE 8-9

SOFT POWER: China and the United States are competing to show off their help in rebuilding monuments at Kathmandu Darbar Square destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

FULL STORY PAGE 14-15



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GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE

For Nepalis, the past week has been historic at many levels. The prolonged 11-year peace process that followed the conflict has finally, and officially, ended with the swearing in of a newly-elected national government under the new Constitution.

The federal structure of the state has now also taken final shape: elected local governments have been in place for six months, provincial assemblies are in place and seven chief ministers have assumed office.

The current juncture is also historic because two of Nepal's biggest fragmented communists have united to form the Nepal Communist Party. The fact that two ideological rivals, one of whom was actively killing members of the other, have decided to unite is no mean feat given the proclivity of Nepal's parties to split every chance they get.

It has been five months since the Maoists and the UML made the surprise announcement that they were setting up an electoral alliance with the aim of ultimately uniting the party. Many scoffed at the idea, saying it was most unlikely. After the left alliance swept all three tiers of elections, however, everyone sat up to take notice. UML and Maoist leaders themselves appeared to have been emboldened by the victory.

Negotiations between K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, however, were not easy. The knotty question was how to accommodate the UML's People's Multiparty Democracy line espoused by Madan Bhandari, with the doctrine of armed struggle of the Maoists.

The differences between hirsute European gentlemen like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin on the one hand, and Mao Zedong prompted comrades from both parties to hold their ground till the very end.

The UML and the Maoists today are both parties of crony capitalists and the 'line' was not so important anymore. The two leaders agreed to become co-chairs of the united party, and Dahal revealed on Tuesday in Chitwan that he was not claiming a rotational prime ministership after 2.5 years.

Whether this was out of a genuine sense of compromise, or because of Dahal's unspoken belief that Oli may not even be able to complete his term is now moot. The fact is that together the NCP now dominates local, provincial and federal assemblies with nearly two-thirds majority.

The real question now is what the party does with that strength. History has given Oli and Dahal an opportunity to turn government into good governance through accountability. The comfortable majority should make the

future parliament and government fairly stable, reduce horse-trading and frequent changes in leadership.

The communist duo have also shown considerable political agility and pragmatism by forging this alliance, and the people will now be watching expectantly whether they deliver on their electoral promise of stability and prosperity. Whether this means the 'stability' of Malaysia, Singapore or China is what we have to be vigilant about. Nepal's history is replete with examples of the temporary stability that autocracies bring.

Five years may seem like a long time, but at the pace things move in Nepal, it is barely enough time to play catch up. Oli has a long to-do list to make up for accumulated neglect of the past decades. We list ten tips for him below in order of priority:

- Ensure genuine devolution of power to provincial and local governments so that they can speed up development and service delivery.
- Tackle corruption, plunder and extortion by rent-seeking rulers hand-in-glove with greedy contractors and the mafia.
- Launch major infrastructure projects, create jobs, drive growth to reduce outmigration.
- Elections are over, Oli doesn't need to bait India anymore, but balance geopolitical relations and rope in neighbours in the development process.
- Speed up post-quake reconstruction.
- Conflict victims and their relatives want closure, they need a credible transitional justice mechanism.
- The treasury has been emptied by the previous government through lavish handouts. Ensure fiscal discipline.
- Address trade imbalance, reduce reliance on imports, redirect energy policy in favour of renewables.
- Start spending unspent development budget without waste and corruption.
- Strengthen the rule of law.

Prime Minister Oli has often said that he wants to use the 'bonus life' after his kidney transplant to raise the living standards of Nepalis. "There is no reason for me to be greedy, I will uphold my personal integrity as well as that of my government," he has said.

Having a prime minister who wants accountability so that he can leave a legacy of socio-economic progress is already a big leap forward for Nepal. Now, all we need to see are results.

ONLINE PACKAGES



Watch short video to find out how China, US and Japan are competing to take credit for rebuilding historic monuments in Kathmandu Darbar Square that were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake. The question is whether we need, or should allow, others to rebuild our heritage for us.



Watch short videos of Nepali youngsters practicing skateboarding in centres supported by London-based illustrator and skater, Gaurab Thakali, who wants to set up more skateboarding arenas in Nepal. Full story also on page 6-7 in this issue.

POLITICS AND THE PEOPLE

The federalisation project, never demanded by the people and rejected by them in the national consultation on the draft constitution, has been a total mess ('Parlour games', Editorial, #897). There is going to be no stability, let alone progress.

Bihari Shrestha

■ We want peace, prosperity and security. We want jobs in our own country. We want unity, not divisions. We want leaders that will take us into the future and not loot us. We want change from *bhagbanda* politics. We want law and order. We do not want the mafia or syndicates to rule us. For all of that, we need new leaders.

Nirmal Sharma

■ Syndicate rule is the right way to describe current Nepali politics.

Shiva Shrestha

■ When elected officials, including big shot Ministers and Prime Ministers, themselves engage in corrupt practices, what can poor Nepalis do? When elected officials take oath and violate it, when citizens cannot depend on the police or courts, or Supreme Court or judges, what can the people do? How many generations will it take to change this?

Sunil Paudel

RIGHT PRIORITIES

The largest number of Nepali migrants leaving via Kathmandu actually are from Province 2 and there is no reason whatsoever for them to go to Kathmandu to depart ('Air jam', Om Astha Rai, #897). The priority needs to be these other airports, and also for the Tarai to keep the revenue generated by these airports.

Joe Niemczura

■ One international airport, one runway built in the sixties. No heads are rolling because everyone is involved in the loot.

Sidhartha Sharma

WHAT'S TRENDING

Natural intelligence

by *Duksangh Sherpa*
The video of Nepali software engineers taking their programmed drone for a test flight to deliver medicines in Khokana was shared widely on social media and got phenomenal response. The video can still be viewed online, and also read about the group Fusemachines and how it is trying to reverse Nepal's brain drain by training an Artificial Intelligence talent pool.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Not so long ago

by *Kunda Dixit*
The remarkable images of Kathmandu Valley in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Peace Corps teacher Daniel W Edwards captivated many readers and our review of his photobook was one of the most read stories in recent times. Visit nepalitimes.com for more images of Kathmandu to see for yourself how much the Valley has changed in such a short time.

Most popular on Twitter

Most visited online page

Parlour games

Editorial
'What the Nepali people are now really waiting for are signs that the UML and Maoists separately, or together, will deliver on their election promise of stability and prosperity.' The Left Alliance has united since that Editorial was written, but it remains to be seen if the expectations of Nepalis will be met. Read the feedback, and let us know your thoughts on nepalitimes.com

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS

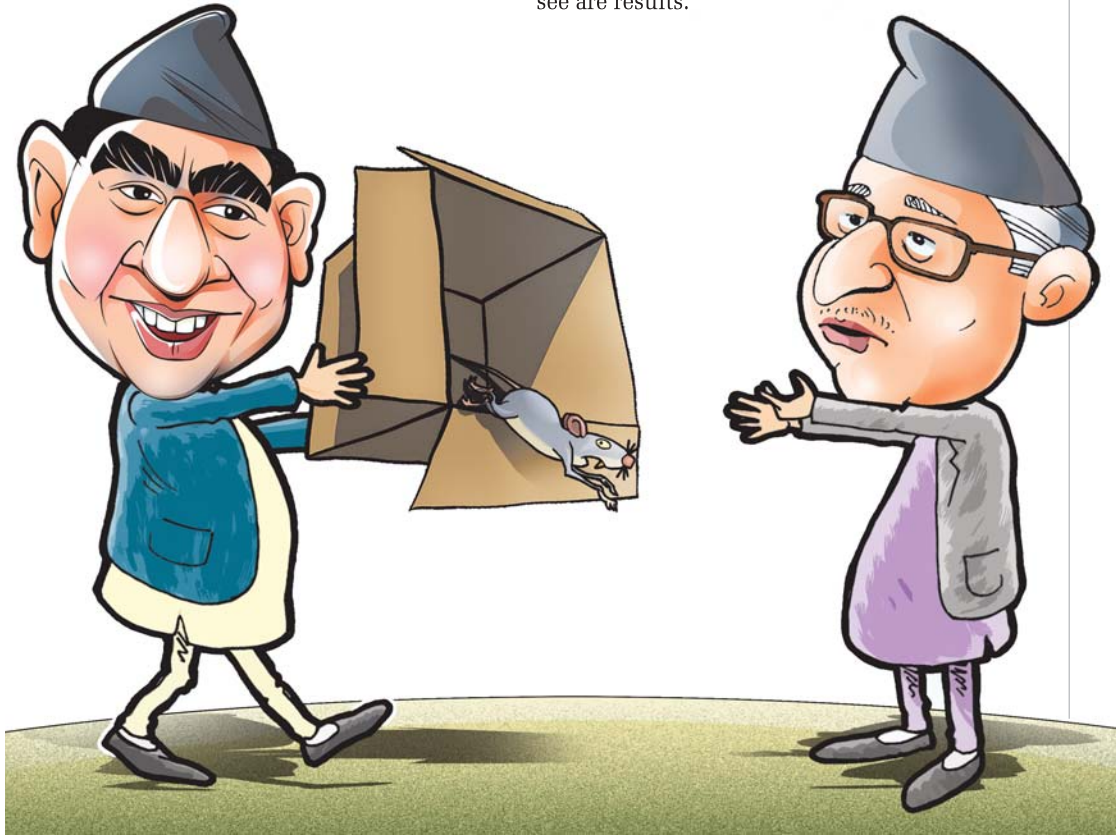
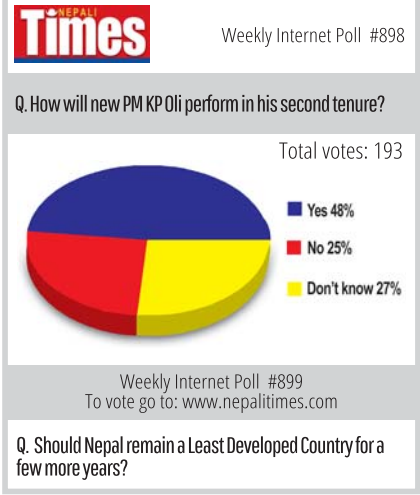
Nepali Times @nepalitimes
Remarkable images of Kathmandu Valley show how much and how fast we changed. See the photos by Daniel W Edwards: <http://bit.ly/2GdTTtQ> #Kathmandu #Nepal

UNICEF Nepal @unicef_nepal
A major throwback : #Kathmandu in 70s when the air was clean, sky was blue and the city was surrounded by open fields and greenery. For every child, clean air.

Rohan Bhadgaonkar @SocioMisfit
The beauty of the country is still unfathomed in many ways. My two years in Nepal has given me a new perspective towards humanity and way of life. #JaiNepal

Nepali Times @nepalitimes
From the Nepali Press @NAYA_PATRIKA The @UN would want to declare Nepal as the latest member nation to join the list of #Developing Economies in 2018, but #Nepal wants to remain in the Least Developed Country (#LDC) category for a few more years.

Narayan Shrestha @NmShrestha Feb 19
Why Nepal wants to stay poor @nepalitimes Reason behind this may seem logical yet it portrays gross inferiority. Do We not deserve to be well off??



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From ‘cannot’ to ‘why not’

Far from being helpless, we are creative, imaginative and innovative.

While a section of Nepali society is in the habit of fatalistically declaring: ‘Nepal cannot even make a needle’, others are quietly innovating smart solutions to solve Nepal’s challenges.

Startup weekends, incubation hubs and idea competitions are being held regularly in Kathmandu, and even in Nepalganj and other cities. The social web is full of invitations to such events, and we are getting used to approaching angel funders and venture funds.



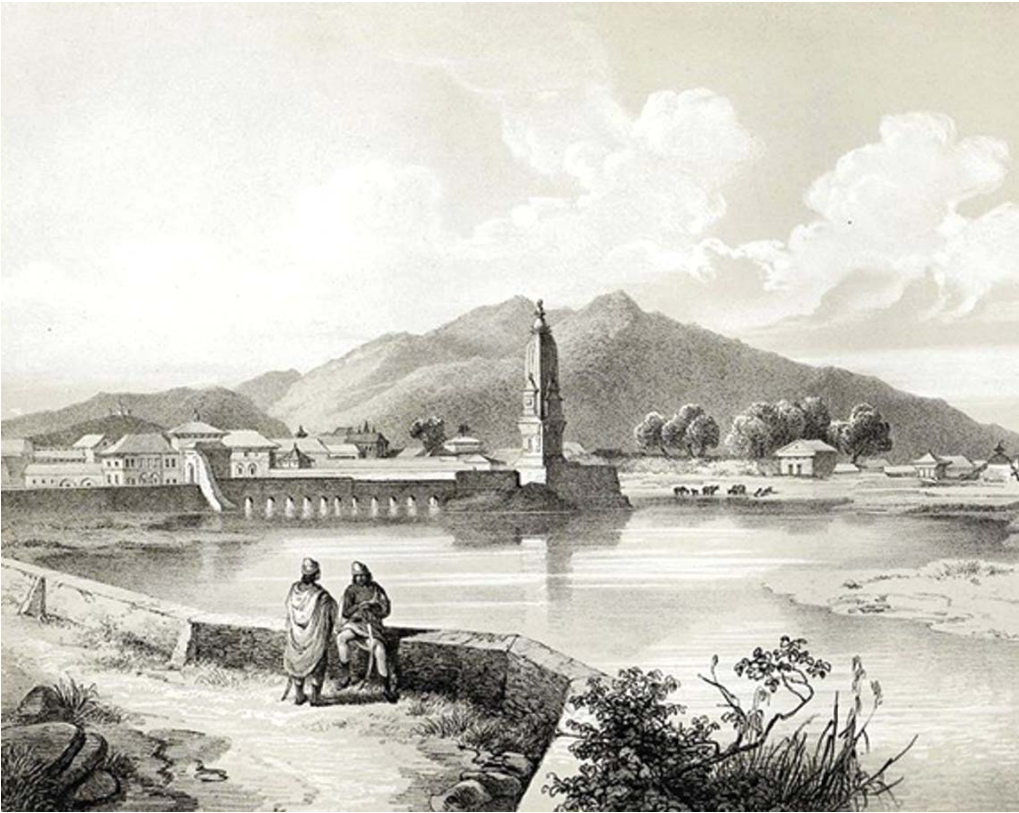
½ FULL

Anil Chitrakar

Mahabir Pun’s Nepal Invention Center also seems to be gathering momentum as resources trickle in from all over the world. At business schools, aspirants are being asked to become self-employed and job creators, not job seekers.

All these activities and opportunities are getting people thinking, designing pitching, building and piloting, new ideas and solutions. It is shifting the conversation among Nepalis from ‘cannot’ to ‘why not’. Real problems have real solutions. A country of nearly 30 million is not a small market -- Nepalis are increasingly not accepting handouts and do not expect the government to solve their problems. This is the perfect time for Nepalis to see if they have what it takes to become an inventor.

A great example of what Nepalis can and have done in the past is the story of the blacksmiths of Baglung who built bridges using an innovative solution of making chain-linked ‘cables’. This was long before steel cables started being imported, which



ultimately displaced the amazing bridges and the blacksmiths who built them.

The National Museum in Chaunni has a machine gun which Nepali inventors designed and built themselves. There is a family of metal castors in Kathmandu who made the ‘lakhe bomb’ for the Nepal-Tibet-China war which jumped up and exploded, sowing fear in the enemy ranks. The Phyuthan and Bhojpuri khukuri or brass pots from Chainpur and Palpa, show Nepali craftsmanship at its best.

Akal Man Nakarmi used to manufacture Peltric turbines in his small workshop in Chhetrapati, while Balaju Yantra Shala crafted and exported its indigenously made cross flow turbines to Indonesia and the Philippines. Nepalis have for generations channeled water through the *raj kulo* networks to supply water to our temples and buildings. Indians used to come across the border to buy Hetauda *Kapada*, and to make phone calls. Just look at our ancient irrigation

canals and the urban landscape of Rani Pokhari. We are capable.

Today we need warehouses to store agro produce, we need cold storage and refrigerated trucks to link the farm to the market. We need to design hybrid energy systems that combine the sources from the sun, local wind and water to give us regular power for 24 hours and 365 days a year. We need to store essential drugs and blood in remote health facilities.

Now that we have regular power supply we need efficient appliances and cleaner transport. We need to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and make sure every child has access to the digital media. No one is going to spend time and energy to invest in the Nepali market or meet Nepali needs – we must do that ourselves.

In Kathmandu Valley there is a tradition where children who do not speak clearly at a young age are taken to the Surya Binayak temple to receive blessings. The problem is that the moment children learn to speak and ask questions, they are told to ‘shut up’. Feudalism comes in many forms and the lack of space to ask questions and challenge the status quo is a big one.

How did we learn to make the best yogurt, pickles, to press oil in the Karnali or to craft mule and yak harnesses? How did we domesticate elephants, learn to distil aromatic plants, and recognise vegetation that heal and provide wellness? Who designed and scaled up the water *ghatta* to mill grain all over Nepal? How did we take to new foods like wheat and potatoes, even adopt new technologies like the smart phone so rapidly?

It’s time to unleash the inventors in us. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc.



Everest to Annapurna

Takashi Miyahara was way ahead of his time when he built the high-end Everest View Hotel in Syangboche in the 1970s. Now, the Japanese entrepreneur who took Nepali citizenship and even ran for elections in 2008, is capping his dramatic career with the Annapurna View Hotel in Pokhara’s Sarangkot.

The new boutique hotel situated at 1,600m offers everything: sunrise, the Annapurnas, view of Phewa Lake, serenity, and luxurious accommodation. The hotel is having a soft opening on Friday, introducing its 24 deluxe rooms designed in contemporary style. Breakfast is arranged by Shristi

Café, while Sansar Restaurant headed by Chef Govinda Khanal serves Japanese, Nepali, Italian and continental cuisine for lunch and dinner.

“There is nothing in between the hotel and the mountains,” says General Manager Sharad Satyal who describes the rooms as being unconventionally spacious enough to provide comfort while being surrounded by some of the tallest and most stunning peaks of the Central Himalaya.

The hotel is a partnership between Miyahara and World Air-Sea Service, a Tokyo based travel company, and has a team of 28 employees and staff who

are all residents of Sarangkot. Hotel Annapurna View will also be offering packages for adventure sports such as paragliding, zipline, ultra-lights, bungee jumping, and is planning helicopter sightseeing flights to Annapurna Base Camp.

Upon completion of construction in October, visitors will be able to enjoy spa and pool facilities along with a chance to attend Nepali cooking lessons. One of the hotel’s iconic attractions is its glass wall in the lobby framing the Mt Machapuchre. It is easy to understand why Miyahara always wanted to build a hotel here.

Sikuma Rai
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**BIZ BRIEFS**

Filming destinations

Turkish Airlines released a new commercial directed by Martin Aamund during the US Super Bowl. The film will be broadcast

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in various destinations of the airline, showcasing the unique qualities of each location.

Qatar’s A350-1000

Qatar Airways has announced the delivery of its first Airbus A350-1000 at the Airbus Delivery Centre in Toulouse, France. The



aircraft will be first of 42 of this type on the airline’s expanding global route network. It features 44 extra seats, with a two-class cabin of 46 Qsuite Business Class seats in a 1-2-1 configuration.

Bankable solar project

Nepal’s Bhrikuti Grid Solar Project won the \$100,000 ‘Making Solar Bankable’ prize at the 2018 Solar Tank Competition in Amsterdam last week. Organised by FMO, a Dutch development bank and Solar Plaza, the Nepal project was selected from among 41 applicants from 24 countries.



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Coca Cola in Nepal offers a chance for its consumers to win an all-expense paid trip to Russia for the FIFA World Cup 2018. With

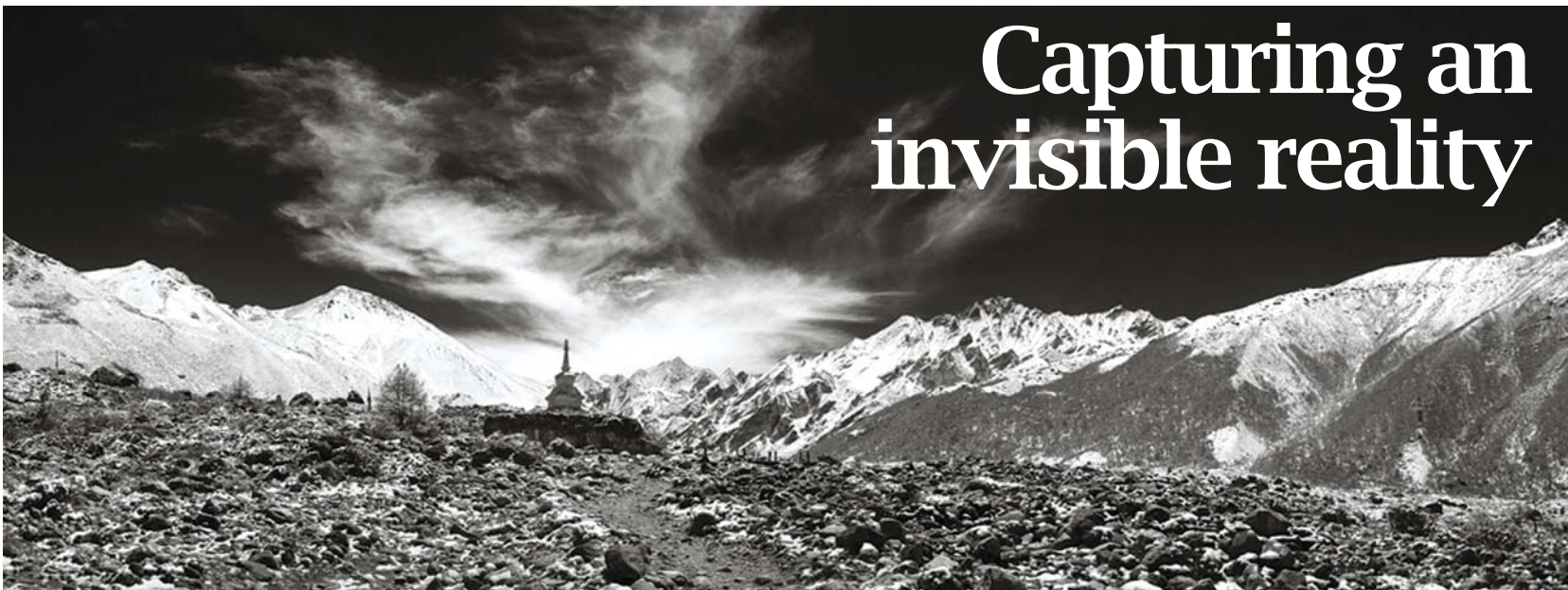


its ‘Coke Khaam, Russia Jaam’ campaign, 40 lucky winners will be selected for the live football ticket, while 200 consumers get to win items like speakers, headphones, pen drive and LED TVs.

Insuring more lives

Citizen Life Insurance Company Limited inaugurated a regional office in Butwal and a branch office in Bhairawa in the presence of its Executive Officer Poshak Raj Poudel and company brand ambassador Hari Bansha Acharya and Madan Krishna Shrestha.





LAURENCE KENT JONES

Laurence Kent Jones was 11 when he first learnt about infrared photography in a second hand encyclopedia gifted by his father. He was struck by the stark clarity and originality of the images. Ever since, he has been fascinated by the urge to record invisible light in film.

Jones' collection of black and white and colour photos of Nepal, Bhutan and India called 'Spectrum' will be on exhibit at the Siddharth Art Gallery till 6 March. The works on display play with light that are of a wavelength that the human eye cannot see. Among the 18 photographs displayed, only three are taken in the visible segment of the spectrum while the rest are experiments in the infrared band.

"Photography allows us to see a lot of things that we can't experience directly," says Jones who is deeply interested in the science and technology of photography. "Especially with the development of the digital camera, one might get lost. But the technology is only there to serve the

work, not the other way around."

Laurence is from a family of artists, and having a painter father influenced his early childhood. Until his thirties he wasn't making much money as an artist, so he decided to join the diplomatic service. For 15 years, except for taking souvenir photos of places he travelled to, Jones wasn't doing any serious photography. He resumed his passion again when he was assigned to directly report from dangerous neighborhoods of Haiti in 2007. He was posted to the US Embassy in Kathmandu two years ago and now after retirement spends time imagining the world through infrared imagery.

In order to take infrared photos, a heat filter needs to block visible light hitting the sensor. Though an expensive modification, Jones took the leap six years ago and now carries two cameras: a Canon 5D M3 for infrared and a 5laDSr for colour.


The exhibition begins with a Langtang landscape (*above*) taken with infrared film which brings out the valley in all its black and

white crispness, the contrasts accentuated by the matt texture of the paper. In infrared, the vegetation reflects light and appears white and this puts the mountains and buildings in sharp contrast. While the first floor of the gallery

has only infrared monochrome, the second floor has colour images. Some of the images of Boudhanath, Taleju Temple and Patan Darbar Square could easily have been touristic, but Jones' images have a stark originality. "A photographer takes

responsibility for every picture even if it is accidental, this wasn't accidental. As an old fashioned photographer I deliberately cut down the light getting to the sensor to get much more moody and evocative pictures," Jones told us.

There are two captures of Patan Darbar Square, one in colour and another infrared. Jones says the coloured one in this case is a stronger image because the leading lines and vanishing points all converge at a spot close to a woman's dramatic face which becomes the main focus.

Laurence Kent Jones enjoys exploring both visible and invisible light, and in doing so brings to us a whole unseen world that forces us to reflect just how narrow is the visual perception of reality that the human retina can process. 

Sikuma Rai

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A young boy is captured mid-air, performing a skateboard trick. He is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and dark shorts. His skateboard is visible below him, with its wheels and deck clearly shown. In the background, there is a graffiti-covered wall and two other people standing and watching. The scene is set in an outdoor skate park area.

Go online for picture gallery of Thakali's work and to watch videos of skateboarding.



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Silver Heritage Group Limited: Group Organisation Chart



Kathmandu's silent spring

SONIA AWALE

The publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* drew public attention to how pesticides had killed much of North America's songbirds. The book launched an international environmental movement.

A similar silence has descended upon Kathmandu Valley, as once ubiquitous birds like sparrows (*big photo*) and mynahs (*right*) decline. And ornithologists who have studied this trend say that in Nepal, too, it is the rampant use of pesticides that is mainly to blame.

"There is a direct correlation between the increase in pesticide use and the decrease in the number of birds in a neighbourhood," explains Jyotendra Thakuri of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN).

Pesticides kill insects on which urban birds depend on for food. But there are also other factors at play: traditional brick houses in which sparrows found holes to nest are giving way to concrete façades. Air is being replaced by exhaust fumes. There are few open spaces and vegetation left for the birds.

BCN has been conducting urban bird monitoring in



Kathmandu Valley and has counted ever-lower numbers of birds each time. Other common birds like drongo, egrets, red-vented bulbul, owls and even fruit bats are equally hard to find.

The house sparrow, once a bird common in every continent except Antarctica, had to be included in the IUCN list of threatened species in 2002 in the UK after a sudden decline in its population.

In India, there has been as much as 90% decline in sparrow populations in several states. There, bird experts have conducted research to find that sparrows are scarcer near mobile phone towers. They believe the electromagnetic

radiation repels sparrows and other urban birdlife.

"As in India, mobile phone towers could also be one of the reasons sparrows are disappearing in Kathmandu," says Vimal Thapa of BCN.

Crows are the other reason for disappearing sparrows as ravens dominate urban ecology and attack young ones of other bird species. Additionally, crows have proliferated because of the Valley's open garbage and improper management of wastewater.

Since 2010, World Sparrow Day is being observed on 20 March, and this year BCN will be marking the day by urging people to take part in an hour-long sparrow-spotting event in their neighbourhoods in order to spread awareness about their declining numbers.

Ornithologist Hem Sagar Baral explains that while sparrows are a worry, there are hundreds of other common urban birds whose populations have declined in recent years, including the drongo, shrike, owls, mynahs and magpie robins.

"Birds deserting our towns and urban areas don't only indicate their dwindling population," added Thakuri. "It also means the environment we live in isn't conducive for human beings either." 🐦

1 in every 5 birds in Nepal is listed as a threatened species, compared to 1 in every 8 globally.

Predator



SANJAY MITRA

When the boys found an eagle stranded in a field in Rautahat district one night last week, they thought they would take the bird home as a pet. But they noticed that it had an electronic device strapped to its back with wires sticking out, and notified the police.

The bird was taken to the District Forest Office where officials found it had been fitted with a satellite tracking device and a ring tag. Nepal's foremost ornithologist Hem Sagar Baral did some investigation, and found out that the eagle had been ringed as a part of a research project involving Korean and Mongolian conservationists studying the migratory routes of raptors between Central Asia and Africa.

Steppe Eagles usually migrate from Mongolia across the Himalaya to Nepal and the Subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula every winter, flying back in summer to breed in Siberia, Korea and Mongolia. It doesn't fly at night and



protector

travels individually. In fact, the species was first described to science from Nepal itself by British resident Brian Houghton Hodgson in 1833 and given its scientific name *Aquila nipalensis*.

This particular eagle was chosen while it was a fledgling in the summer of 2016 and strapped with equipment including a Korean SIM card with battery and solar panel, and an aluminum alloy ring with the inscription: oxnith.lab, nst, biol,mongolia 271. After few days it was set free and it was tracked by satellite telemetry as it flew south across China, over Tibet and the Nepal Himalaya to spend the winter in the Bangladesh and returned to Mongolia in spring last year.

This year, the eagle seemed to have made the same trip along the same route and was on its way back to Mongolia when it landed in Rautahat district in southern Nepal last week. Baral said the bird looked sick, and explained that it could have been incapacitated by fatigue, bad weather or could have fed on carrion containing the banned anti-inflammatory veterinary drug, diclofenac, which is lethal to raptors.

“The eagle is recovering at the Central Zoo and once it is ready, we will let it continue its journey to Mongolia,” Baral told *Nepali Times*.

The most plausible explanation for the grounding of the Mongolian Steppe Eagle in Nepal is that it could have fed on diclofenac-laced carcass. Over 90% of the vultures and eagles in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal were killed by the drug in the last 20 years. Although the drug was subsequently banned throughout the region in 2006, Baral says there are other nonsteroidal drugs still being used on livestock that harm vultures and eagles.

Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) has set up a chain of seven ‘vulture restaurants’ across the Tarai and mid-hills in an effort to provide the birds of prey with uncontaminated meat.

Jyotendra Thakuri of BCN says that areas with strong community conservation programs in Nepal have seen vulture and eagle populations either stabilising or rising in numbers. 🇳🇵

Frequent fliers



JYOTENDRA THAKURI

Loss of wetlands, pesticide use and hunting along migratory routes have led to a sharp drop in the number of birds wintering in Nepal, an avian census last month has confirmed.

The census was carried out 6-22 January in Kosi Tappu, Chitwan, Bardia and 50 other protected water bodies and lakes across Nepal. Preliminary data shows a decline in both the number of water birds as well as the variety species spotted (see graph below).

“Each one of the water dependent bird species, both indigenous and migratory, is

declining steadily in Nepal,” ornithologist Hem Sagar Baral said. “In fact, one in every five birds in Nepal is listed as a threatened species, compared to one in every eight globally.”

Nepal is home to 888 species of birds, of which some 212 are migratory and 168 of them are on nationally threatened list. Migratory birds use Nepal’s lakes and rivers as stopovers on their traditional migratory routes.

“Nepal is an important stopover for many species. some birds stay on, while others fly on to India, Sri Lanka and Africa,” said Vimal

Rimal of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN). “Numerous migratory species also stop in Nepal when returning north.”

The Steppe Eagles that was found in Saptari last week (see adjoining report) was on its flight back to Mongolia probably after wintering in Bangladesh. The Himalaya is not a barrier for the raptors, water fowls and cranes as they navigate with inbuilt magnetic sensors along traditional migratory routes. Their lungs and muscles have adapted to flying up to 7,000m.

Scientists are now using satellite telemetry to collect information on migration timing, speed of flight, route and stopovers along the Central Asian Flyway which traverses the Himalayan mountains. Data show that waterfowls use three main corridors across Nepal to migrate between Mongolia through Tibet to India: across western Nepal, over Chitwan and through the Kosi Valley.

Bar-headed geese, for instance, have been tracked by satellite on overnight flights lasting more than 18 hours from Rajasthan over western Nepal to lakes in Tibet. They stay close to the terrain to take advantage of updrafts, and then when they need to go over mountains ride the jet stream to push them more rapidly to their destination. They undertake return

journeys in autumn before the jet stream resumes so they don’t have headwind. Ruddy shelducks also migrate to and from the Kosi Tappu sanctuary up the river to the Tibetan plateau and further northward towards Siberia.

However, all major birding sites like Kosi Tappu, Chitwan, Pokhara, Taudaha, Shuklaphanta, Bardia and Ghodaghodi have recorded fewer sightings in the recent years, both in winter and summer. Migratory bird species common to Nepal until early 2000s like Eurasian curlew, Pallas’s fish eagle, Caspian tern, Baer’s pochard, Eurasian spoonbill and Hodgson’s bushchat (left) have not been sighted here since the turn of the century, whereas some residents birds have now become visitors.

Until a decade ago, Taudaha used to see up to 2,000 birds in a year, many of them migratory water birds. But this winter the bird count showed less than 150 individuals. Locals lining the perimeter of the lake with concrete to make it a picnic spot could be one reason for the decline.

Said Jyotendra Thakuri of BCN: “Habitat loss, use of agro-chemicals, pollution, climate change and haphazard urbanisation are the contributing factors for the decline and loss of many bird species in Nepal.” 🇳🇵

Sonia Awale

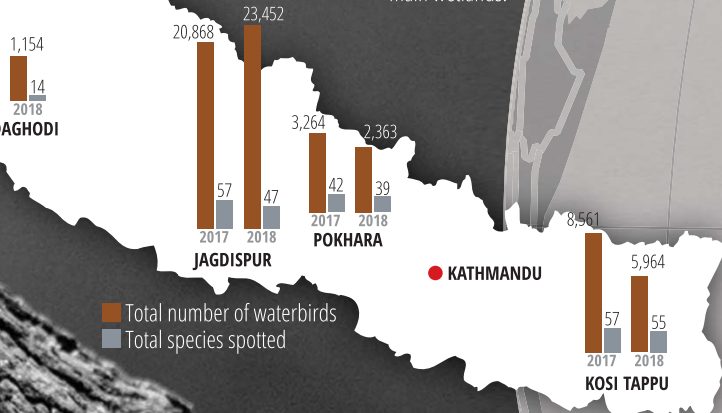
CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY

Satellite telemetry shows routes three migratory birds take to cross the Himalaya from Mongolia, via Tibet to Nepal and on to India.



AVIAN CENSUS

There have been sharp drops in total winter waterbird counts and number of species spotted in the past year in Nepal’s four main wetlands.



BIRDS OF NEPAL

Total bird species: **888**

Number of migratory species: **212**

Number of birds in threatened list: **168**

EVENTS



Pub crawl

Enjoy music, food, and beer at the Nepal International Beer Festival, spread across 3 venues: Musicology (2-5pm), Base Camp Outdoor Lifestyle (5-7pm) and Evoke Café & Bistro (7-10pm).
24 February, 12-10pm, Jhamsikhel-Bakhundol, Rs300 (for all 3 venues), 9851111051, 9823838929

Bangladesh Expo

The 4th edition of this trade fair features products made in Bangladesh such as building and construction materials, furniture, jute products, garments, ceramics, textiles, leather, footwear, electronics, cosmetics and more.
23-27 February, 9am-6pm
Bhrikutimandap Exhibition Hall

Critical Mass KTM

A call out to all cyclists to meet at Kathmandu Durbar Square for a fun ride around the city.
23 February, 5:30pm onwards, Basantapur

Zen-doodle yatra

Learn the basics of doodling, and doodle as a way to practice mindfulness.
23 February, 10am-10pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, Rs500 for registration



Talk Session

Join talk featuring Kapil Tamot, Managing Partner of White Lotus Centre & Chair of the Investment Committee at Business Oxygen, and learn about more investment prospects in Nepal.
23 February, 4-5pm, Nepal Communitere, Pulchok, (01) 5530229

Astra Mic Night

Open mic platform for poetry, acoustic music, storytelling and stand-up comedy.
1 March, 5-8pm, Bikalpa Art center, Pulchowk, Rs100(pre-sale)/Rs150(door), 9851147776,



Open Air Holi

Celebrate the festival of colours at one of the most happening restaurants in Kathmandu.
1 March, 10am-5pm, Trisara, Lazimpat, (01) 4410200

Japanese film festival

Ballad and The Garden of Words on Friday and A Tale of Samurai Cooking, Brave Story and Mameshiba on Saturday.
23-24 February, Tribhuvan Army Officers' Club, Tundikhel, (01) 4426680



Engaged arts

An art event where four Nepali and four American artists share their perspectives on the importance of art and culture during these challenging times for the environment of Nepal.
4 March, 3-5pm, Taragaon Museum, Boudhanath Sadak, (01) 5178105

Colourful celebration

Multi-cuisine fiesta, fun games with local and international acts, interactive art installations and a themed bar for celebration of colors with friends and family.
1 March, 10am-5pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Rajnikunj, 9619484524

MUSIC



Jarabe de Palo

Spanish singer, songwriter and guitarist, Pau Donés will be performing with his rock group for the night. The musical group has received Premios de la Música, Premio Ondas and Grammy nominations.
23 February, 7-9pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs1,999(pre-sale)/Rs2,499(door), 9849377915/ 9851075172

The Folk festival

Take part in the biggest folk festival where the Folkers will be performing great folk songs. Rare Nepali folk musical instruments will be exhibited, along with madal and sarangi ensembles.
24 February, 3-10pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Rs500, (01) 5543554, 9813556945

For Kurt

A tribute show featuring the band Newaz All Stars Kickass, with special artists: Suncha Vox and Shirish Dali from Albatross and Swapnil Sharma from The Shadows Nepal.
24 February, 7pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Rs250(pre-sale)/Rs500(door), 9804458896, 9841267127



Base Camp Music Festival

The 2nd edition of Base Camp Music Festival will start with a full-moon party performance by Cultivation & Himalions, a reggae band from KTM. The festival is a month long event.
1 March, 1pm onwards, Base Camp: Outdoor Lifestyle, Arun Thapa Chowk, 9841226397

OUR PICK



Opens in Kathmandu on 23 February

Peter Rabbit is based on the stories of a rebellious rabbit of the same name created by Beatrix Potter. Directed by Will Gluck, the animation tells tale of Peter, voiced by James Corden who loves sneaking into a farmer's vegetable garden. The story develops as Mr McGregor (Domhnall Gleeson) tries to get rid of Peter and his cousins from the garden and rivals for affections of a local woman named Bea (Rose Byrne), who is Peter's only human friend.

DINING



Roadhouse

Visit Roadhouse for handcrafted salads, sandwiches, desserts and espressos, besides their already famous firewood pizza. Try the Greek salad and sizzling brownie with ice cream.
Boudhanath Stupa, (01)4916446

Fire and Ice Pizzeria

One of the oldest pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice continues to serve some of the most delicious pizzas and pastas in town.
Thamel, (01) 4250210

Alice Restaurant

Step in for scrumptious Thakali, Chinese, Continental, and Japanese cuisine. Give their Baby Corn Chili and Katohn, which is the Thakali version of blood sausage, a try.
Gairidhara, Kathmandu, (01) 4429207



Embers

A spacious and cosy place serving a mix of continental and Nepali favourites. For starters, don't forget to try the vegetarian bruschetta and deep fried prawns.
Krishna Galli, Pulchowk, (01) 5534766/5555306

Evoke Café and Bistro

Evoke is more than just a café serving specialty tea and coffee. Try the delectable Cuisse de Poulet and Chicken Florentine to entice your taste buds.
Jhamsikhel Lalitpur, 9851111051

New Orleans

Buckwheat waffles, fluffy pancakes, low fat yogurt and the very famous golden prawn at the old courtyard garden.
Thamel, (01) 4700736

GETAWAY



Kasara Resort

Spend a few days in Chitwan for bird watching between March to May. The resort is a blend of modern luxury with lush and organic, natural jungle environment.
Chitwan National Park, Bharatpur, 9801171127

Tiger Mountain

Offering more than just unique panoramic views of the Himalaya: learn about the Greater Barbet, Blue-throated Barbet, Blue-naped Pita, among the 332 bird species in Pokhara, and enjoy a getaway close to nature.
Kandani Danda, Pokhara, (01) 4720580

Hotel Country Villa

Escape to Nagarkot to celebrate the festival of colours and wake up to the beautiful and refreshing sunrise that the area offers.
(01) 4700305/ 9851192106



Shivapuri Heights

Spend a night at the Cottage, celebrating the victory of good over evil with friends and family. Enjoy the full moon rising against Shivapuri Hills.
Shivapuri, Rs4,500/7,000, 9841371927/9802012245

Atithi Resort & Spa

A quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities, complete with a fancy pool and a cosy restaurant.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (06)1466760

Lake View Resort

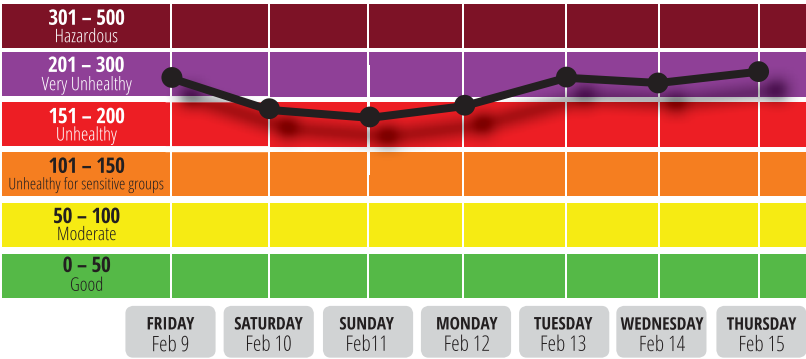
Enjoy Nepali Folk dance show with Nepali cuisine, local beer and Phewa Lake view
Lake side, (61) 461477

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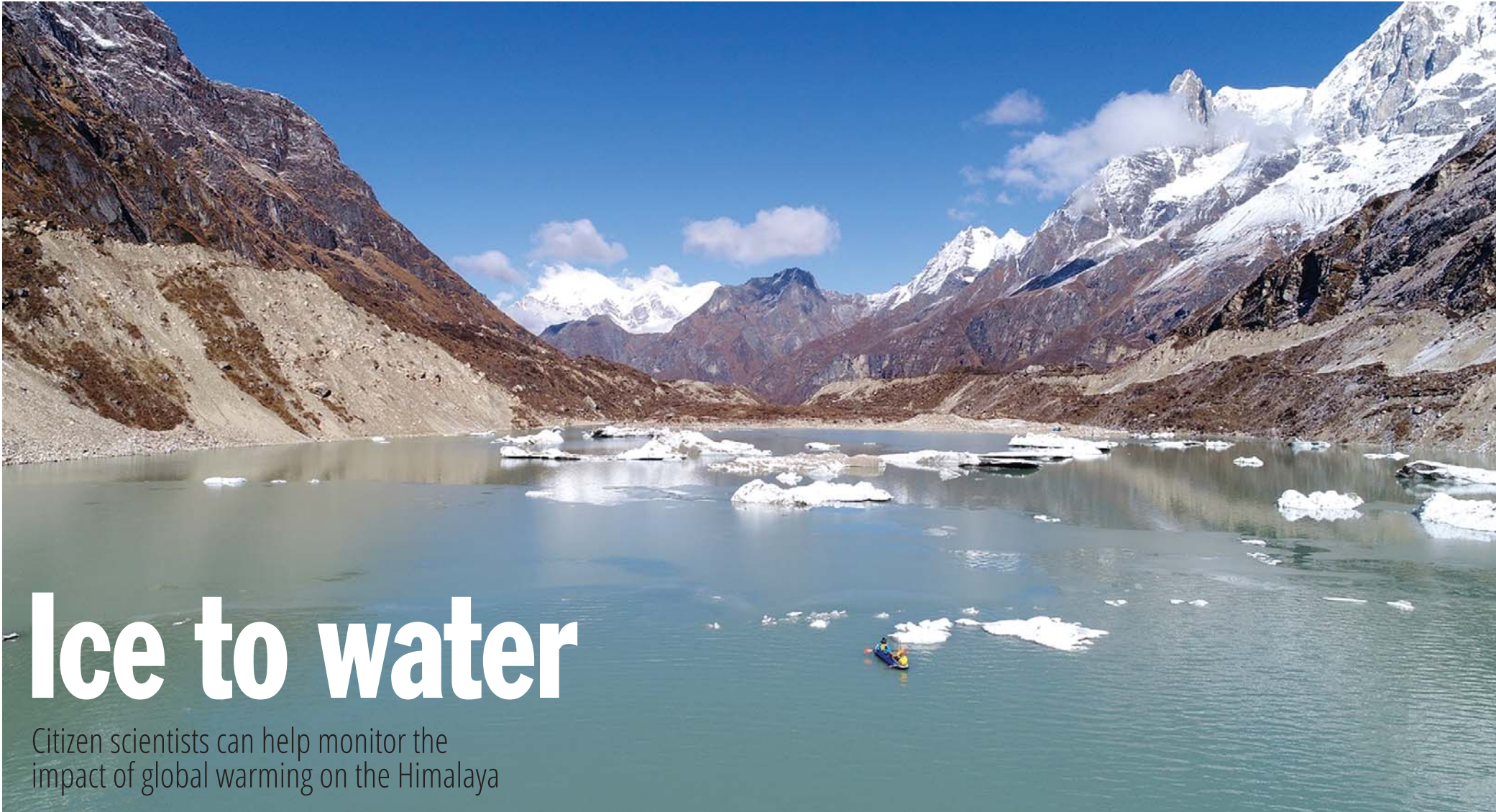
BEST ENJOYED CHILLED!
facebook.com/hinwawines

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 16 - 22 February



This week's daily averages of the Air Quality Index measured at the monitoring station at Phora Darbar shows the expected dip on Saturday due to reduced vehicular emissions. We expected there to be a similar dip on Tuesday, when a shutdown was enforced by a political faction. However, since most people in Kathmandu ignored it and traffic was moving as on a normal weekday, air pollution levels stayed in the 'Very Unhealthy' level. The good news is that in general, air quality will improve as overnight temperatures rise in the Valley and the inversion effect is lessened. The bad news is that it will still be pretty unhealthy.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>



BOTH PHOTOS: DAN JANTZEN

Ice to water

Citizen scientists can help monitor the impact of global warming on the Himalaya

C SCOTT WATSON

Mountain environment is rapidly changing. Climate change is leading to warmer temperatures and changing precipitation patterns, directly impacting Himalayan glaciers. Nepal is home to some of the highest glaciers in the world, yet many will diminish to shadows of their former selves in the coming centuries. Glaciers are retreating to pockets of sun-hidden refuge, where lower air temperatures prolong their existence in the shade of the high mountains. The scenery attracts visitors from all over the world, but tourists are transient. It is the Nepalis who call this landscape of extremes their home. While scientific research tries to understand how glaciers will rapidly disappear, working with those affected to mutually share observations and adaptation strategies is now critical.

Glaciers are vast reservoirs of water, pathways to the highest peaks on earth and home to communities of living things. When experiencing their beauty, we should also consider their demise and be proactive towards global strategies to slow the rate of change and engage with sustainable adaptation strategies.

Glaciers are intrinsically linked to and indeed shape the mountain environment. In turn, sediment and rock transported onto the surface of debris-covered glaciers shapes their evolution. This insulating layer of rocks and sediment can grow several metres and obscures the moving ice beneath. Yet, the glaciers are shrinking rapidly.

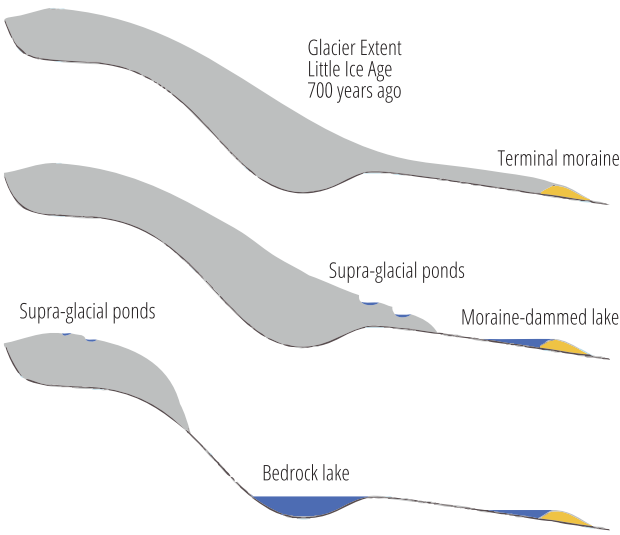
Khumbu Glacier is thinned by an average of ~1 m per year (1984-2015) where the insulating debris is thinnest close to Everest Base Camp. The spatial distribution of thinning leads to a flatter glacier profile, although local relief can still exceed tens of metres. A flatter glacier is more prone to water ponding on the surface, which can eventually form large glacial lakes.

At Everest Base Camp, the Khumbu Glacier is flowing down-valley at over 30 m per year. Yet there is virtually no movement 7 km further down the glacier adjacent to the village of Lobuche. Exposed ice cliffs and supraglacial ponds on the glacier surface are hot-spots of melt. The ponds absorb and transmit thermal energy into the glacier interior, such



There are hundreds of new glacial lakes (red dots, above) that have emerged in the Nepal Himalaya in the last 30 years. Many of them are growing alarmingly and are in danger of bursting.

GLACIERS IN FULL RETREAT



that the process can become a positive feedback loop, leading to an expanding network of ponds. With a pond at their base, ice cliffs rapidly retreat across the glacier, generating melt water and leaving a trail of fallen debris.

Stagnating glaciers provide new habitat for birds, bees, small mammals, macro invertebrates (small critters living in ponds), and occasionally grazing livestock. Vegetation grows when the glacier slows and the surface stabilises.

Because the wall of sediment and rocks blocking the lake are of unknown stability, downstream communities can be threatened and require close field monitoring and analysis of satellite imagery.

The hydropower potential of these lakes could one day be tapped, however, some lakes will inevitably breach their dams and cause downstream flooding, often triggered by large avalanches. Access to water resources will change as snow cover reduces and glaciers disappear, also requiring community adaptation. Therefore, awareness, early warning, and adaptation is key.

There is often a disconnect between scientists, mountain communities, transient mountain visitors, and government and non-government agencies. Scientists should be open about observed and predicted changes, but also the associated uncertainties.

Open Access publishing allows scientific research to be read by all. Communities can retain vast historical knowledge of previous

HIMALAYAN MELTDOWN: A raft with scientists monitoring the expansion of Thulagi Glacial Lake in Central Nepal (above) is dwarfed by the surrounding mountains and the water body that has grown alarmingly in the past two decades due to global warming.

An aerial view of Thulagi Glacial Lake (left) shows the fragile moraine that blocks the water. Collapse of these moraine dams threatens communities, hydropower plants and highways downstream.

environmental stresses, and are well placed to describe ongoing changes and their adaptation requirements. Engagement is therefore key for research to be targeted efficiently and used to guide adaptation strategies.

Anyone can volunteer and become a citizen scientist: communities, mountaineers and tourists can all contribute to targeted data collection and analysis. Communities are well placed for continual observations targeted to local needs, such as stream and river flows, timing of the growing seasons, and documentation of flood events.

Local and international mountaineers access the highest peaks on earth and can bring back snow and rock samples, maintain weather stations, capture repeat photography and provide specialist knowledge of changes in the high-mountain environment.

Tourists can also capture repeat photography, and may also have the opportunity to capture aerial imagery from helicopter flights, which can be used to reconstruct the environment in 3D. There are opportunities for everyone to engage with research that is ultimately geared towards improving our understanding of global change and how best to adapt. 🇳🇵

C Scott Watson is an environmental research scientist and runs the outreach website RockyGlaciers.co.uk.
Twitter: @CScottWatson



Black Panther

The soon to be historic new Marvel film, *Black Panther* is now out in cinemas, and it is as good as they get in terms of the Marvel cinematic universe thus far. Starring a pre-dominantly all-black cast, fittingly, for a film about a fictitious African nation that is the holder of mysterious, almost



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

magical metal named Vibranium, the film is visually stunning, the cast really quite wonderful, and the plot, somewhat basic.

Luckily this original story does not suffer too much from the slightly banal storyline due to all of the ensemble characters, the special effects, and the novelty of seeing such a stunning array of extremely talented black actors

unapologetically onscreen, wielding their talent in a much anticipated, long delayed film that has tried to make it onto the screen since Wesley Snipes first displayed an interest in it in 1992.

Starring the handsome, charismatic Chadwick Boseman as the King of Wakanda, T'Challa, aka the Black Panther, the film follows the crowning of T'Challa after the death of his beloved father. The opening scenes take place against a stunning setting amidst a plateau of waterfalls, bringing a hitherto unseen kind of beauty and originality to what might otherwise have been a banal, token ceremony. The fictitious African tribes are portrayed with grace and beauty by the precise, proud eye of the director, Ryan Coogler, the 31-year-old African American director of the great boxing film *Creed* (2015), who shows his talent and ability without faltering throughout an ambitious film that never stalls.

T'Challa is aided in his story by the lovely Lupita Nyong'o as Nakia, the tough, feisty love of his life whose social conscience is a guiding force for the film. However, even more than Boseman, Nyong'o, or the lovely Angela Bassett who plays Ramonda, T'Challa's mother, it is the gorgeous, playful, incredibly watchable Letitia Wright who steals the show as T'Challa's younger sister and tech-geek extraordinaire, filling in as Shuri, a sort of female version of "Q" – a character beloved in the Bond films.

There is much to love in *Black Panther*, but among its treasures, the poor one-dimensional villain is not among them. Spouting the offensive philosophy that Wakanda should make its superior weapons available to all the oppressed people around the world, and mainly the black people who have been given short shrift in North America, Killmonger, played by Michael B. Jordan, rises as an unlikeable hero with a truly ridiculous hair-style in a role that is unleavened by his tragic history.

It is a relief to see, and to hope, that long gone are the days where women, and people of colour could not helm, and star in the most ambitious and expensive of Hollywood films. It has been a long time coming, with people like Harvey Weinstein and other similarly deplorable old white men holding the reigns to an industry that ought to be as diverse as the films that reach far and wide across the globe. Let us hope that *Black Panther* and last year's unforgettable *Wonder Woman* are a sign of things to come.



Watch trailer online

nepaltimes.com

HAPPENINGS



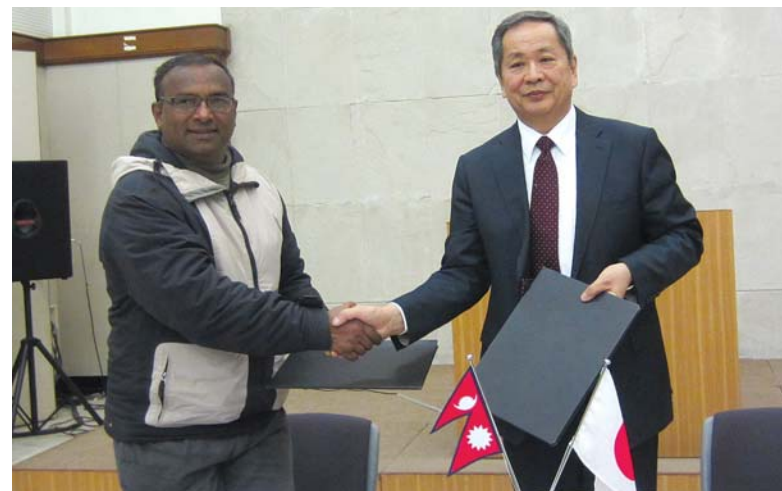
BIKRAM RAI

ON THE RECORD: Maoist leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha briefs journalists about the unification deal between the UML and Maoist-Centre at Baluwatar on Monday that led to the formation of the unified Nepal Communist Party (NCP).



RSS

BATTLE OF WILLS: Amidst allegations regarding his date of birth, activist Govinda KC with supporters showing his academic credentials and citizenship during a press conference at the Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



JAPANESE EMBASSY

DEAL SEALED: Ambassador of Japan to Nepal, Masashi Ogawa (right) with Krishna Prasad Chaulagain of the quake-hit Rural Community Health Service Centre in Sindhupalchok, after signing an agreement for medical equipment worth Rs3.3 million.



KATHAHARU

WOWMEN: Speakers Ani Choying Drolma, Rekha Thapa and Mira Rai during a panel discussion at the Women of the World event held in Pulchok on Saturday.



AGNI GROUP

CUSTOMER IS KING: Cabinet Shrestha of Agni Group (right) with other dignitaries at the inauguration of the new Mahindra showroom of Manaram Motors in Sankhuwasabha District last week.

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Highway rest house

Nirbhikjung Raymajhi in setopati.com, 22 February

सेतोपाटी

Min Bahadur Khadka, 85, remembers travelers walking to Kathmandu from the east spending the night in the small, white, lime and mortar rest house in Banepa. Porters would rest their loads, light a fire by the rest house and tuck in before they resumed their journey to Kathmandu the next day.

When the Arniko Highway was built in the 1960s, workers including Khadka lived in the house. During hot summer days, Khadka would cool off on the top floor. The rest house was forgotten as the highway replaced the foot trail. Today, the building is in a dilapidated condition, further damaged by the 2015 earthquake. The wood on the doors and windows have rotted, it is over-run with weeds inside and outside. But the roof, the stucco decorations and structure are still intact

and if restored it could serve as a museum. Built by a local businessman Hari Bhakta Bade and his brother Krishna Bhakta Bade 105 years ago, the two-storey rest house is called Setopati (white resting place). Some even call it Putalipati after the two female figures on the corners of the front facade. “It provided shelter to a lot of people at the time. The beautiful and modern design made it the identity of Banepa,” says historian Gyan Kaji Manandhar. Punyamaya Shrestha would go to the rest house to play hide-and-seek with her friends or take shelter from the rain in monsoon. Often she would meet new people who were taking a break from their journey. Once the Arniko Highway was built and travelers stopped coming, it became a spot for drug addicts and beggars. “Some were even found dead here, so the locals stopped coming,” says Shrestha. It served as a polling station during the first Panchayat era elections as well as later ones, and for a time it housed the office of Red Cross.



SETOPATI

The rest house is 8m by 5m and has half-a-dozen arched windows and there are figures depicting lions and birds on the outer wall. On the inside are wooden platforms for beds and also to store luggage and goods. On the left side of the rest house, there is a stone spout which is still functioning. “It can be restored with minimum

budget,” says Manandhar, “If the wall and the windows can be restored, it will be as good as new.” Banepa’s new mayor Laxmi Narayan Bade says the municipality is planning to preserve and restore heritage sites: “Development is our first priority but we will look into heritage conservation as well.”

Why Nepal wants to stay poor

Naya Patrika, 19 February

नयाँ पत्रिका

The UN would want to declare Nepal as the latest member nation to join the list of Developing Economies in 2018, but Nepal wants to remain in the Least Developed Country (LDC) category for a few more years. Nepal has officially requested the UN to not put it on the list of Developing Economies just before a meeting in March to review the status of each LDC and forward recommendations to the UN General Assembly. Nepal fears that it may lose foreign aid if it graduates from LDC status, and argues its economy is still vulnerable to various threats including natural disasters. Nepal recently sent a high-level delegation to New York to lobby with the UN-OHRLS to not graduate it from the LDC category. A country has to meet three criteria to graduate from LDC status: at least

\$1,242 Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, above 66 score in Human Assets Index (HAI) and below 32 score in Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI). When the UN had last reviewed the status of LDC countries in 2015, Nepal had achieved more than enough HAI (68.7) and EVI (26.8) scores. If Nepal is found to have maintained its HAI and EVI rankings when the UN-OHRLS meets next month, it will graduate from its LDC category – even if it fails to meet GNI per capita. Nepal has increased its literacy and Net Enrolment Rates (NER) sufficiently to maintain its HAI growth, and its EVI ranking has also improved over the last three years because of connectivity and export conditions. But Nepal argues that its GNI per capita was just \$862 in 2017, and it will be unable to sustain HAI and EVI growth unless its national income grows. Nepal has also questioned the modality of determining EVI ranking, arguing its score should be less than was has been determined.

The UN-OHRLS looks into 12 indicators to determine whether a country's economy is vulnerable, but it does not consider threats that Nepal's economy has faced: earthquake, Blockade, flood and landslide. Nepal argues that its economy can be described as safe only without factoring in these threats. Economist Swarnim Wagle, who resigned as Vice Chair of National Planning Commission (NPC) this week, says: “The UN indicators to determine a country's economic vulnerability were based on African countries in the 70s, which cannot be applicable to Nepal. The UN must reconsider its own indicators before declaring Nepal a developing country.” As an LDC, Nepal enjoys concessional loans, have export privileges, get technical support to expand its market and money for climate change adaptation. At a time when Nepal is hoping for more foreign aid to support new federal structure, it does not want to lose potential funding by being identified as a developing nation.



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PHOTOS: BIKRAM RAI

A monumental rivalry

Post-quake reconstruction of Kathmandu's temples is mired in geopolitics

OM ASTHA RAI

When the Mallas ruled the kingdoms within the Valley of Kathmandu, they were constantly trying to outdo each other to build ever more impressive monuments. Many of these structures in Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu were destroyed in the 2015 earthquakes.

Today, the competition to rebuild the temples is not among the descendants of the Malla kings, but between rival world powers.

Visitors to the Kathmandu's historic palace complex these days have to pass under an elaborate gate festooned with Chinese flags

announcing the restoration of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace.

Further on, hanging from the scaffolding of the damaged *Gaddi Baithak* are outsized signs adorned with the American star spangled banner. At the entrance to the palace courtyard amidst structures propped up with timber beams, is a relatively smaller billboard with the Japanese flag detailing Japan's assistance in restoration work.

The imposing *Nautale Darbar* which was built after the Shahs conquered Kathmandu in 1769 used to dominate the complex, and lost its top four floors in the earthquake. This nine-storey brick and timber structure and three other smaller towers surrounding *Lohan Chowk*, are being rebuilt by

the Chinese government.

Beside its pompous welcome gate at the entrance to the palace complex, the Chinese have also put up exhibits explaining to the public details of its reconstruction work.

This has irked other countries which are also involved in restoration. Said one diplomatic source: "The gate and posters give the impression that China is rebuilding the whole palace. It is a bit in-your-face."

Not to be outdone by the overt Chinese display of its generosity, the Americans have also covered both sides of their *Gaddi Baithak* restoration with huge banners. The European-style neoclassical building suffered heavy damage,

and is being rebuilt with a \$700,000 grant from the US Ambassador Fund for Cultural Preservation with the Miyamoto Disaster Relief Fund carrying out the restoration.

Japan is mainly restoring the *Agam Chen* and Hanuman Gate, and appears to be far behind the other two donors in taking credit for its restoration project.

Heritage experts say Nepal has always rebuilt its monuments after earthquakes that have struck Kathmandu Valley every century or so. When it comes to donor offer of support, it seems modern Nepal just cannot say a polite 'No, thank you we can do this ourselves'.

A larger worry is that after giving the permission for restoration, the Department of

Archeology (DoA) has taken a back seat in ensuring that the projects comply with heritage reconstruction guidelines.

In 1979, the architecture firm of John Sanday used steel beams instead of traditional timber in renovating the *Nautale Darbar* to strengthen the structure, but the palace collapsed anyway in 2015. Some architects reckon the building may have withstood the 7.8 magnitude shaking if traditional timber joints were used, giving it more flexibility.

Architect and historian Sudarshan Raj Tiwari visited the *Nautale Darbar* recently, and says the Chinese were about to repeat the mistake of using steel columns. He says the Chinese

Bhaktapur shows the

SUYOG PRAJAPATI

Bhaktapur has always been known for the unique architecture of its medieval squares and buildings. But the 2015 earthquake destroyed nearly a quarter of this ancient city, including monuments in its famous palace square.

Nearly three years later, with its well-defined guidelines, economic sources and a trained workforce, Bhaktapur is steadily rebuilding itself. Unlike in Kathmandu where foreign donors are competing with each other to help reconstruct (*see above*), here it is the municipality and the locals that have taken charge.

After the earthquake, many donors pledged monetary support for the recovery of the heritage sites in Kathmandu Valley including Bhaktapur, which was originally restored under a German project in the 1970s.

"Various international organisations, China and Japan expressed interest to rebuild the entire city. The German government in fact wanted to conduct another Bhaktapur Development Project like in the 70s and 80s," recalls Surya Bhakta Kharbuja, senior engineer at the Heritage Conservation Unit in Bhaktapur Darbar Square.

The Germans wanted to return to Bhaktapur, where

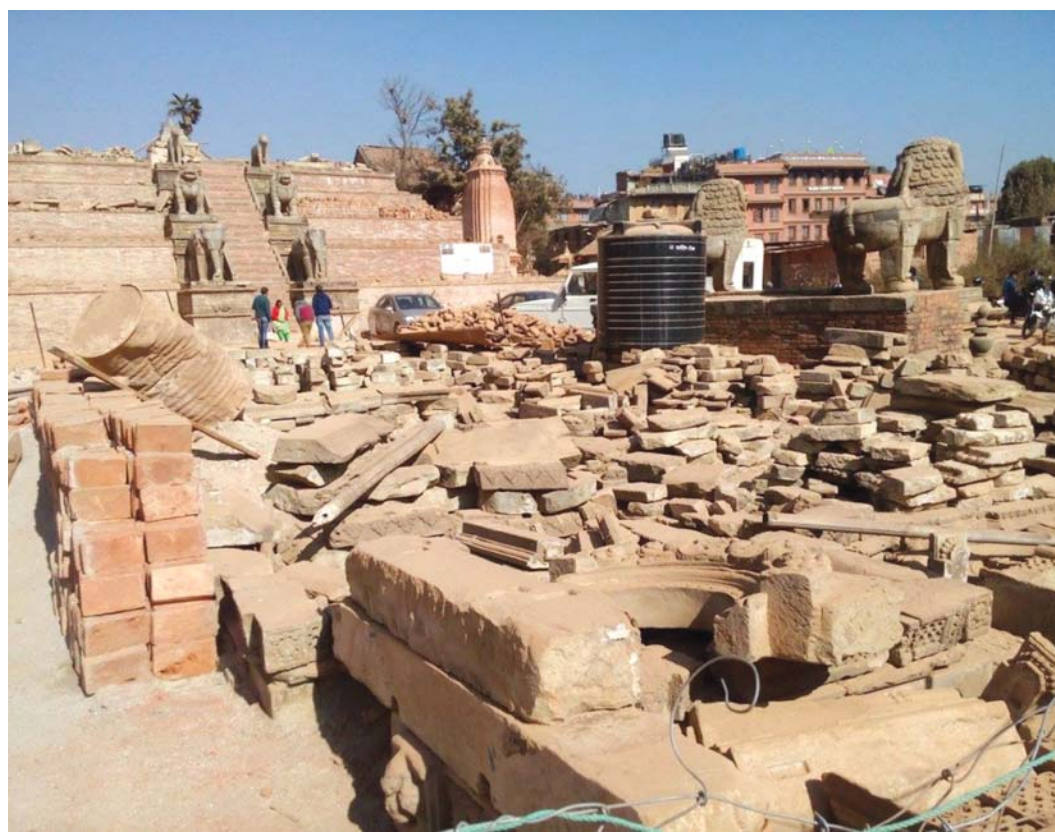
many of the monuments they had restored 40 years ago withstood the earthquake, and they tried to convince the local authorities here to allow them to support another urban renewal project.

The municipality declined the offer and decided to rebuild the heritage using its own resources with help from Department of Archaeology (DoA), the *Guthi Sansthan* and the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA).

Even before the earthquake, Bhaktapur municipality had established norms for heritage conservation and restoration. After 2015, reconstruction was delayed for five months because although the NRA had directives for new concrete buildings, none were provided for traditional clay-wood-brick structures. The city had to come up with its own guidelines to preserve the old construction methods.

Since 2015, the municipality has documented 116 archaeological heritage sites for reconstruction and renovation with monuments on the tourist routes and those promoting tourist business and trade have been given the priority for rebuilding.

So far, 23 projects have been implemented, including ten for the monuments in Durbar Square and two in Dattatraya Square. The Bhimsen and Narayan temples at Dattatraya and the three Narayan temples in Darbar Square have already been completed, three other monuments in Ta:mari Square are planned for renovation by next year.





assured him they would henceforth use traditional materials.

Tiwari is a purist when it comes to heritage restoration, and has led high-profile activism against the use of cement and steel in the renovation of Rani Pokhari and Kasthamandap. He does not approve of the DoA's heritage reconstruction guidelines that allow the use of modern material if traditional materials are not available.

"The DoA has not even bothered to check if its own problematic guidelines are being followed," Tiwari told us. "They just sign MoUs with donors and go to sleep."

In its defence, the DoA says it is indeed monitoring the heritage reconstruction guidelines through its site office at the Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Museum Development Committee.

However, when we asked heritage officer Jaya Narayan Karki at the Committee this week, he revealed he had no mandate to inspect reconstruction.

"We sometimes try to intervene because it is happening in front of our own eyes, but the DoA has

SOFT POWER: China, the United States and Japan are rebuilding sections of Kathmandu Palace Complex (*left to right above*) with some outsized signs proclaiming their assistance.

not officially asked us to monitor if the Chinese or Americans are following our guidelines," Karki said.

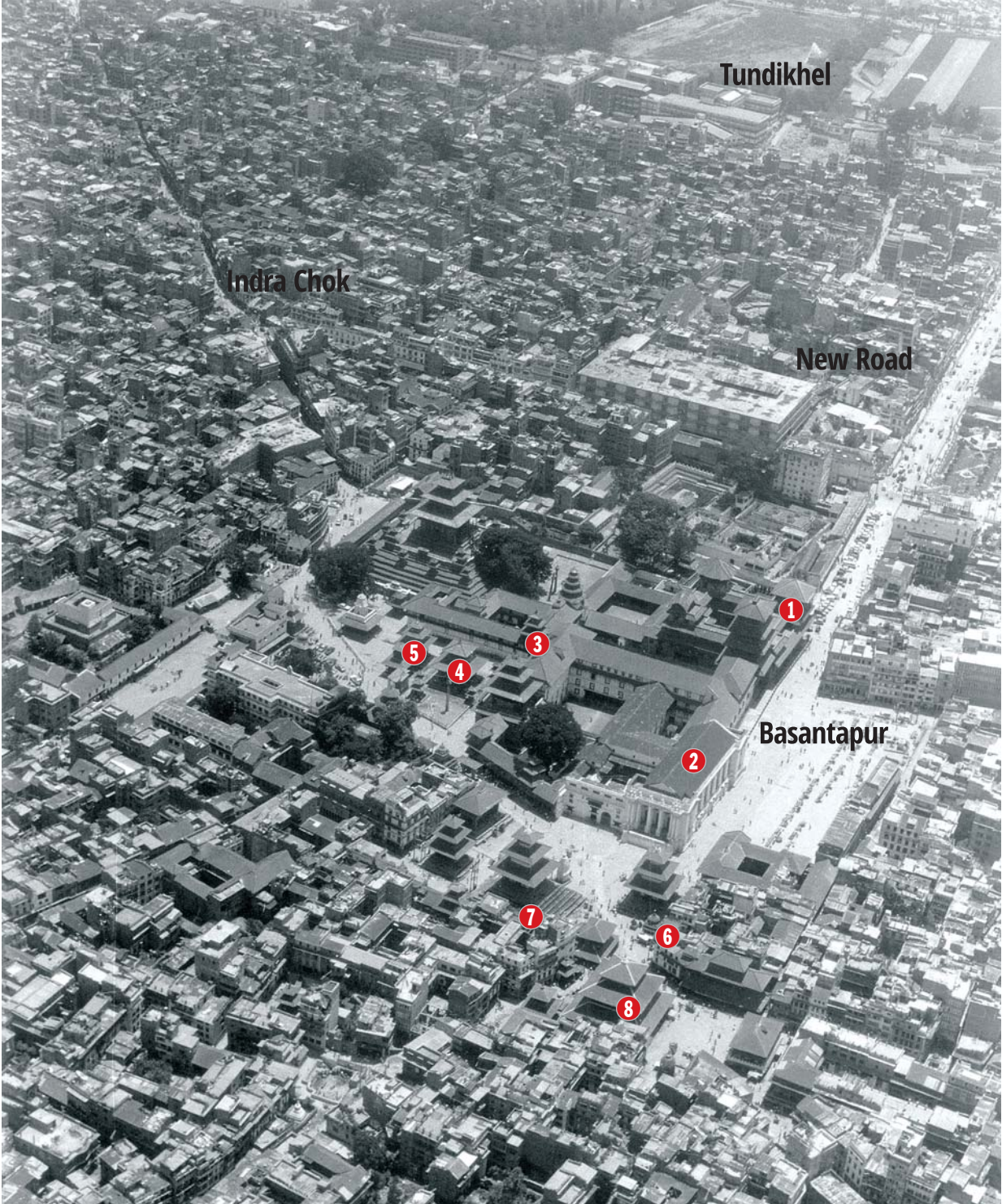
Heritage conservation activists say it would have been ideal for Nepal to rebuild all its monuments itself like it has done in the past, or like Bhaktapur is doing (*see report below*). If help was needed, the government should have sought support on condition that the projects were channeled through the DoA and ensured participation of local communities.

The DoA has been reduced to a rubber stamp body and local communities say they do not have a say in the rebuilding process, and don't know what the foreigners are doing to monuments built by their

ancestors.

There have been no public hearings, and there is no local coordination committee. The only information locals get are from the display panels and banners put up by the Chinese and the Americans, with no way to verify if that is how restoration is being carried out.

Architect Alina Tamrakar says: "Local communities might not have a sense of ownership of the buildings if they are excluded from the heritage conservation and reconstruction process." 🇳🇵



Watch short video to find out how China, US and Japan are competing to take credit for rebuilding historic monuments in Kathmandu Darbar Square that were destroyed in the 2015 earthquake.

[nepalitimes.com](#) 🖱️

- 🇨🇳 1 Nautale Darbar (China)
- 🇺🇸 2 Gaddi Baithak (US)
- 🇯🇵 3 Aagan Chhen and Hanuman Dhoka (Japan)
- 🏛️ 4 Jagannath Temple (UNESCO)
- 🏛️ 5 Shree Krishna Mahavishnu Temple (UNESCO)
- 🇳🇵 6 Trailokya Mohan Temple (DoA)
- 🇳🇵 7 Maju Dega (KMC)
- 🇳🇵 8 Kasthamandap (Community)

way by rebuilding itself



PHOTO: SUYOG PRAJAPATI

The stone Vatsala Temple, Lohan Dega and Kedarnath Temple in Darbar Square are under construction.

Of the total budget for reconstruction, 15% came from the government, 35% from the entry fees of tourists, 10% from taxes, and the remaining from various semi-private sources. Since 2015, 20% of the budget has actually been spent on a yearly basis for reconstruction and maintenance. The DoA has provided Rs400 million.

An Archaeological Excavation and Reconstruction Committee does the micro-evaluation and reports to both the municipality and DOA. If required, reports ultimately go to the NRA. Senior advisers from the Institute of Engineering and Khwopa Engineering College provide technical support to the municipality.

"Only traditional construction materials like wood, brick and lime mortar are used for historic monuments," says Kharbuja. "All the newly reconstructed temples have internal wooden structures that provide flexibility and support."

The timber comes from Tarai districts and is high quality sal hardwood procured through the National Timber Corporation at a set price of Rs4,100 per cubic feet. Other than lime powder, all raw materials including bricks and stones came from within Nepal. The five month

Blockade in 2015 slowed down work, but things have picked up again.

One problem has been that some skilled craftsmen have left Bhaktapur for better paying jobs elsewhere. But many others are staying behind to learn the skills and transfer them to future generations.

Besides the government, private donors have also contributed towards heritage preservation. The municipality in fact welcomes such undertakings at communal sites.

Small temples, rest houses (*pāṭīs*) and minor shrines are being taken care of by local volunteers. Unlike the major heritage sites where tenders are announced and contractors are given tasks, local preservation work initiated by the community only needs

a simple application in order to be approved by the municipality.

Although this city of 80,000 inhabitants is much smaller in size than historic Kathmandu, the level of enthusiasm and consciousness among the administrators and also among the general public sets Bhaktapur apart. The difference could be seen even before the 2015 disaster, and Bhaktapur offers plenty of lessons on how to manage reconstruction. 🇳🇵





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Since The Ass is not an astrologer, he has taken to consulting Shri Gangaram Donkey before sitting down to write this weekly column to answer some of the burning questions of the day. Being a newspaper of record-keeping, I cannot get things wrong, and have to strive for utmost accuracy.

Minister will keep sensitive ministries like the Ministry of Water Resources and Dam Building as well as the Ministry of Ministers without Portfolios.

Meanwhile, Kathmandu's new mayor has also unveiled the First Phase of his plan to turn Nepal's capital into a Garden of Eden. "I will open a Peace



That is why this week, the questions to the fortune teller were naturally the following: Will North Korea launch another missile? Will loadshedding return this spring? How long will the Eh-Male and Maobuddy unity last? Or, who are going to be the lucky buggers who make it to the new Cabinet lineup?

I can now reveal in the strictest confidence what I learnt from the Astrologer General about what the stars have in store for the new Council of Ministers. As expected, the word from Balu Water is that the *alopalo* PM and Chairmen are having a hard time with the *bandfand* since the constitution puts a cap on the size of the Cabinet to 48 inches at the waist.

Therefore, the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Over-Supply, and the Minister for Justification and Parliamentary Affairs will, on the recommendation of the prime minister, also look after the Ministry of Irritation, Population, Environment, Physical Therapy and No Works.

The Ministry of Foreigner Affairs will be merged with the Ministry of Illegitimate Affairs under which will fall the Department of Labour and Midwifery. The new Ministry of Family Planning and Adultery will have a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Miscommunication and Disinformation, while also gathering useful gossip from the Directorate of Military Intelligence.

The Ministry of General Administration will, in the absence of the Defensive Minister, also take care of the Ministry of Culture Shock and Tourism. For the time being, through the Prime

University, an IT University, an Art Village in Kirtipur, Homes for the Homeless, Voice for the Voiceless, a Cricket Stadium, a 24-Hour Bar for Journalists, a Bullet Train Service to Hetauda through a 50km Tunnel, a Cement Factory in Tundikhel and turn Ratna Park into a Car Park," he said, adding, "nothing is impossible if I have my way." However, on the question of the city's growing garbage problem, the mayor admitted defeat. Raising both hands, he said: "On garbage, I give up."

In other news: the Ministry of Horsing Around has formed a 108-member Steering Committee to organise this year's Ghode Jatra on Tundikhel which, in the interest of the government's general policy of austerity and belt-tightening will be combined with Gai Jatra, reports RSS.

"The idea is to start lumping our festivals together since there are too many of them anyway," one of the 14 vice-chairmen of the publicity subcommittee whose name begins with "P" said under condition of complete animosity.

Addressing a press interaction program at the Rappoteur's Club, he said several bulls, which had registered their names for the equestrian events and vice-versa, had been disqualified for having fake birth certificates, and would be charge-sheeted in due course.

Instead of the cavalry making gravity-defying jumps over Armoured Personnel Carriers in the Obstacles Event, participating water buffaloes this year would be required to take part in a paragliding contest by jumping off helicopters above Tundikhel.



The Ass

